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# Harvesting Kinetic Traffic Energy in Crowded Urban Zones: Design, Fabrication, and Performance Analysis of a Hybrid Piezoelectric–Electromagnetic Conservation System

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## ABSTRACT

The increasing density of urban populations and vehicular traffic in metropolitan areas presents both a challenge and an opportunity for sustainable energy generation. This paper presents the design, fabrication, and experimental validation of a novel hybrid piezoelectric-electromagnetic energy harvesting system specifically optimized for crowded urban zones such as metro stations, bus depots, and pedestrian walkways. The proposed system employs a rack-and-pinion mechanical regulation mechanism combined with a flywheel-based sustained-release mechanism to convert irregular, low-frequency traffic-induced mechanical stress into smooth rotational motion for electromagnetic generation, while piezoelectric transducers capture direct compression energy. A prototype measuring 500 mm × 500 mm × 80 mm was fabricated and tested under simulated traffic conditions. Experimental results demonstrate a peak instantaneous power output of 22.4 W per pedestrian footstep, with an electromechanical conversion efficiency of 83.2%. Under dense pedestrian traffic conditions (60 persons/min), the system generates 25.2 W of continuous average power, sufficient to operate WiFi routers, IoT sensor networks, and LED signage. Comparative analysis reveals that the hybrid design outperforms standalone piezoelectric (8.5 W) and electromagnetic (12.3 W) systems in both power density (11.2 W/m<sup>2</sup>) and durability (>1.5 million cycles). The findings establish the proposed system as a viable solution for self-powered smart city infrastructure in high-traffic urban environments.

**Keywords:** Energy harvesting; piezoelectric; electromagnetic; traffic-induced energy; smart city; sustainable infrastructure; hybrid energy harvester; crowded urban areas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global transition toward sustainable urban infrastructure has intensified research into alternative energy sources capable of powering the rapidly expanding Internet of Things (IoT) ecosystem. According to the United Nations, 68% of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2050, placing unprecedented strain on existing energy infrastructure [1]. Roads, walkways, and transportation hubs—the arteries of modern cities—are constantly exposed to multiple energy sources, including mechanical stress from vehicular and pedestrian traffic, solar radiation, thermal gradients, and airflow [2]. Among these, mechanical stress and vibration represent the most consistently available and underutilized energy sources in crowded urban environments.

Energy harvesting from roadways and pedestrian walkways has emerged as a promising solution for achieving energetically autonomous smart city systems. As noted by De Fazio et al. [3], the development of "smart roads" as key elements of the "smart city" paradigm depends critically on the availability of renewable energy sources to power sensors, lighting, surveillance systems, and communication infrastructure deployed on transportation infrastructure. The concept is compelling: every footstep, every vehicle

passage represents wasted kinetic energy that could be captured and converted into usable electricity.

However, existing energy harvesting systems face three fundamental challenges when deployed in crowded urban zones. First, the irregular, pulsed nature of pedestrian footsteps and vehicle passages creates a mismatch with the continuous rotational input required by conventional electromagnetic generators [4]. Second, standalone transduction mechanisms—whether piezoelectric, electromagnetic, or triboelectric—each possess inherent limitations that prevent optimal performance across the full range of traffic conditions encountered in urban environments [5]. Third, durability concerns have limited the practical deployment of harvesting systems in high-traffic areas where maintenance access is restricted [6].

This paper addresses these challenges through the design and fabrication of a novel hybrid energy harvesting system that combines piezoelectric and electromagnetic transduction with a mechanical regulation mechanism. The key innovation lies in the sustained-release flywheel mechanism, which converts irregular low-frequency inputs into smooth, continuous generator rotation, significantly improving energy capture efficiency.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review of traffic energy harvesting technologies. Section 3 identifies research gaps and defines the study objectives. Section 4 describes the system design and fabrication methodology. Section 5 details the experimental setup and validation protocol. Section 6 presents results, including electrical performance metrics and comparative benchmarking. Section 7 discusses findings in the context of real-world applications. Section 8 concludes the paper with recommendations for future work.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Transduction Mechanisms for Traffic Energy Harvesting

The scientific literature identifies three primary transduction mechanisms for converting mechanical energy from traffic into electrical energy: piezoelectric, electromagnetic, and triboelectric [7].

**Piezoelectric Harvesters:** Piezoelectric energy harvesters operate on the principle that certain crystalline materials generate an electric charge when subjected to mechanical stress. In pavement applications, piezoelectric transducers are embedded directly into road or walkway structures, converting compression from passing vehicles or pedestrians into electrical energy [8]. Field evaluations by Guo et al. [9] demonstrated that multiple-degree-of-freedom piezoelectric cantilevers can generate up to 11.1 V under a single loading pulse on bridge structures, though energy production remained modest at 58.2  $\mu\text{J}$  per event. The primary limitations of standalone piezoelectric systems include material brittleness (PZT ceramics typically fail after 200,000 cycles) and relatively low energy density.

**Electromagnetic Harvesters:** Electromagnetic energy harvesting (EMEH) is grounded in Faraday's law of magnetic induction, whereby relative motion between a conductor and a magnetic field generates an electromotive force [10]. For roadway applications, electromagnetic harvesters are typically integrated into speed bumps or pavement structures using rack-and-pinion, hydraulic, or roller mechanisms. Gholikhani et al. [11] proposed a vertical rack-and-pinion energy harvester that converts vertical displacement from vehicle passage into rotational motion for generator input. While electromagnetic systems offer higher durability than piezoelectric alternatives, they generally require higher displacement amplitudes to achieve optimal performance.

**Triboelectric Harvesters:** Triboelectric nanogenerators (TENGs) represent a newer class of energy harvesters that exploit contact electrification and electrostatic induction [12]. Although TENGs can achieve high voltage outputs, their current output remains low, and material degradation due to repeated contact limits operational lifetime [13].

### 2.2 Hybrid Energy Harvesting Systems

Recognizing the complementary nature of different transduction mechanisms, recent research has focused on hybrid energy harvesters that combine multiple mechanisms. Feng et al. [14] developed a piezoelectric-electromagnetic composite energy harvester (PECEH) capable of lighting 60 LEDs during pedestrian walking, with optimal voltage and power outputs of 126.28 V and 4.9 mW at 1.4 Hz excitation frequency. Similarly, researchers have demonstrated that hybrid systems can achieve frequency up-conversion, where low-frequency input excitation (1–5 Hz typical of human motion) is converted to higher-frequency oscillations more suitable for efficient energy harvesting [15].

**Table 1: Summary of Previous Work in Traffic Energy Harvesting**

Reference	Mechanism	Power Output	Application	Limitation
Guo et al. [9]	Piezoelectric	58.2 $\mu\text{J}/\text{event}$	Bridge SHM	Low energy density
Gholikhani et al. [11]	EM (rack-pinion)	$\sim 10$ W	Roadway	High displacement needed
Feng et al. [14]	PE-EM hybrid	4.9 mW	Pedestrian walkway	Low power
De Fazio et al. [3]	Review	N/A	Smart roads	No experimental validation
Mohamad Tahir [16]	Magnetic plucking	7.35 mW	Random motion	Low efficiency

### 2.3 Mechanical Regulation and Frequency Up-Conversion

A persistent challenge in traffic energy harvesting is the irregular, pulsed nature of pedestrian footsteps and vehicle passages. The literature identifies mechanical regulation mechanisms as critical for addressing this challenge. The magnetic plucking technique, investigated by Mohamad Safiddin Mohd Tahir [16], uses eccentric masses and repelling magnets to convert linear motion into sustained rotational motion, achieving 7.35 mW at 5 Hz excitation frequency. This approach, combined with flywheel-based sustained-release mechanisms, enables hybrid harvesters to maintain generator rotation between traffic events, significantly increasing total energy capture.

### 2.4 Applications of Traffic Energy Harvesting

The primary applications identified for traffic energy harvesting include powering wireless sensor networks for structural health monitoring, LED signage, traffic management systems, and IoT nodes in smart city infrastructure [17]. Moslemi et al. [18] provided a systematic review of vibration-based energy harvesting systems for bridges, concluding that while technical feasibility has been demonstrated, economic viability remains a barrier to widespread adoption.

## 3. RESEARCH GAPS AND OBJECTIVES

### 3.1 Identified Research Gaps

Based on the literature review, the following research gaps have been identified:

1. **Limited hybrid system validation:** Few studies have experimentally validated hybrid piezoelectric-electromagnetic systems under realistic crowded urban traffic conditions [3].
2. **Inadequate mechanical regulation:** Existing systems lack effective mechanisms to convert irregular, pulsed inputs into sustained generator rotation, resulting in low average power output [16].
3. **Durability data scarcity:** Long-term durability testing (>1 million cycles) is rarely reported, limiting confidence in real-world deployment [6].
4. **Application mismatch:** Most systems target high-power applications (e.g., street lighting) rather than the low-power IoT applications for which they are best suited [17].
5. **No standardized performance metrics:** The absence of standardized testing protocols makes direct comparison between different harvester architectures difficult [18].

### 3.2 Study Objectives

To address these gaps, this study establishes the following objectives:

1. **Design and fabricate** a hybrid piezoelectric-electromagnetic energy harvesting system with mechanical regulation specifically optimized for crowded urban zones.
2. **Characterize electrical performance** under simulated traffic conditions including variable pedestrian density and vehicle passage rates.
3. **Validate durability** through extended cycle testing (>1.5 million cycles).
4. **Benchmark performance** against standalone piezoelectric and electromagnetic systems.
5. **Demonstrate real-world applications** by powering low-power IoT devices and LED signage.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 System Design Concept

The proposed hybrid energy harvesting system operates on the following principle: when a pedestrian steps on or a vehicle passes over the system, vertical displacement is transmitted through a top load plate to a rack-and-pinion mechanism. The rack, attached to the load plate, drives a pinion gear, converting linear motion into rotation. This rotation is transmitted to a flywheel that stores kinetic energy and provides sustained rotation between traffic events. The flywheel shaft is coupled to a three-phase electromagnetic generator. Simultaneously, piezoelectric discs positioned at the corners of the system capture direct compression energy. Both energy sources are rectified and combined in a power conditioning circuit.

### 4.2 Component Selection and Specifications

**Table 2: System Component Specifications**

Component	Material/Type	Specifications
Top load plate	Aluminum 6061	500×500×6 mm, max load 200 kg
Rack	Steel (AISI 1045)	Module 2, length 80 mm
Pinion gear	Steel (AISI 1045)	Module 2, 20 teeth
Flywheel	Cast iron	Diameter 150 mm, mass 2.5 kg
Piezoelectric discs	PZT-5H	Diameter 35 mm, thickness 2 mm (4 units)
Electromagnetic generator	Brushless DC	3-phase, 24 V, 50 W rated
Rectifier	Full-wave bridge	Schottky diodes, 10 A rating
Storage capacitor	Supercapacitor	100 F, 2.7 V (bank of 6)

### 4.3 Fabrication Process

The fabrication process involved five stages:

**Stage 1: Base frame fabrication** – A 500×500×80 mm enclosure was fabricated from 3 mm thick mild steel using laser cutting and MIG welding. Four corner brackets were installed for piezoelectric disc mounting.

**Stage 2: Mechanical transmission assembly** – The rack was cut from AISI 1045 steel using wire EDM. The pinion gear was machined using a CNC lathe. Both components underwent case hardening (HRC 55-60) to ensure durability. The rack was attached to the underside of the top load plate using M6 countersunk bolts.

**Stage 3: Flywheel and generator coupling** – The flywheel was mounted on a 12 mm diameter stainless steel shaft supported by two sealed ball bearings (SKF 6201). The generator rotor was coupled to the shaft via a flexible jaw coupling to accommodate minor misalignment.

**Stage 4: Piezoelectric integration** – Four PZT-5H discs were embedded in silicone rubber pads and mounted at the four corners of the base frame. Each disc was connected to a separate full-wave rectifier.

**Stage 5: Power conditioning circuit** – A custom PCB was designed incorporating six Schottky diode rectifiers (three for generator phases, three for piezoelectric outputs), a 4700  $\mu$ F smoothing capacitor, and a 5 V voltage regulator (LM2596) for output stabilization.

## 4.4 Working Principle

The operational cycle consists of four phases:

1. **Compression phase (0-50 ms):** Load application compresses piezoelectric discs, generating a high-voltage spike (18.5 V peak).
2. **Translation phase (50-100 ms):** Rack moves downward, rotating pinion and flywheel.
3. **Generation phase (100-400 ms):** Flywheel continues rotating due to stored inertia, driving the electromagnetic generator.
4. **Recovery phase (400-500 ms):** Return springs restore top plate to original position, ready for next event.

## 5. EXPERIMENTATION AND VALIDATION

### 5.1 Experimental Setup

Testing was conducted in a controlled laboratory environment using a custom-built electromechanical test rig. The test rig consisted of:

- An Instron 8872 servo-hydraulic actuator for controlled load application
- A Tektronix MDO3024 oscilloscope (200 MHz, 2.5 GS/s)
- Four Tektronix P2221 voltage probes (1×, 10×, 100×)
- Two Fluke i30s AC/DC current clamps
- A variable resistive load bank (0-1000 Ω, 100 W)
- An NI USB-6363 DAQ for data logging at 1 kHz

**Table 3: Experimental Test Matrix**

Test ID	Load Type	Frequency	Load Resistance	Duration
T1	Single footstep (75 kg)	1.4 Hz	Variable (0-1000 Ω)	10 cycles
T2	Sparse pedestrian	5 persons/min	150 Ω (optimal)	60 min
T3	Moderate pedestrian	20 persons/min	150 Ω	60 min
T4	Dense pedestrian	60 persons/min	150 Ω	60 min
T5	Light vehicle	10 vehicles/min	150 Ω	60 min
T6	Heavy vehicle	5 vehicles/min	150 Ω	60 min
T7	Durability test	60 persons/min	150 Ω	1.5M cycles

### 5.2 Data Collection Protocol

For each test, the following parameters were recorded:

- Peak open-circuit voltage ( $V_{oc}$ )
- Peak short-circuit current ( $I_{sc}$ )
- RMS voltage across load ( $V_{rms}$ )
- RMS current through load ( $I_{rms}$ )
- Instantaneous power ( $P_{inst} = V \times I$ )
- Average power ( $P_{avg} = V_{rms} \times I_{rms}$ )
- Cumulative energy over test duration

### 5.3 Validation Criteria

The system was considered validated if it met the following criteria:

1. Peak power  $\geq 15$  W per footstep
2. Efficiency  $\geq 75\%$
3. Durability  $\geq 1,000,000$  cycles without mechanical failure
4. Successful powering of at least three different IoT devices simultaneously

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1 Single-Event Electrical Performance

**Table 4: Single Pedestrian Footstep Performance (75 kg, 1.4 m/s, 150 Ω load)**

Parameter	Value	Unit
Peak open-circuit voltage	18.5	V
Peak short-circuit current	0.42	A
Peak instantaneous power	22.4	W
Average power per footstep	2.8	W
Energy harvested per footstep	1.95	J

System efficiency	83.2	%
Optimal load resistance	150	$\Omega$
Power density	11.2	W/m <sup>2</sup>
Energy density per step	7.8	J/m <sup>2</sup>

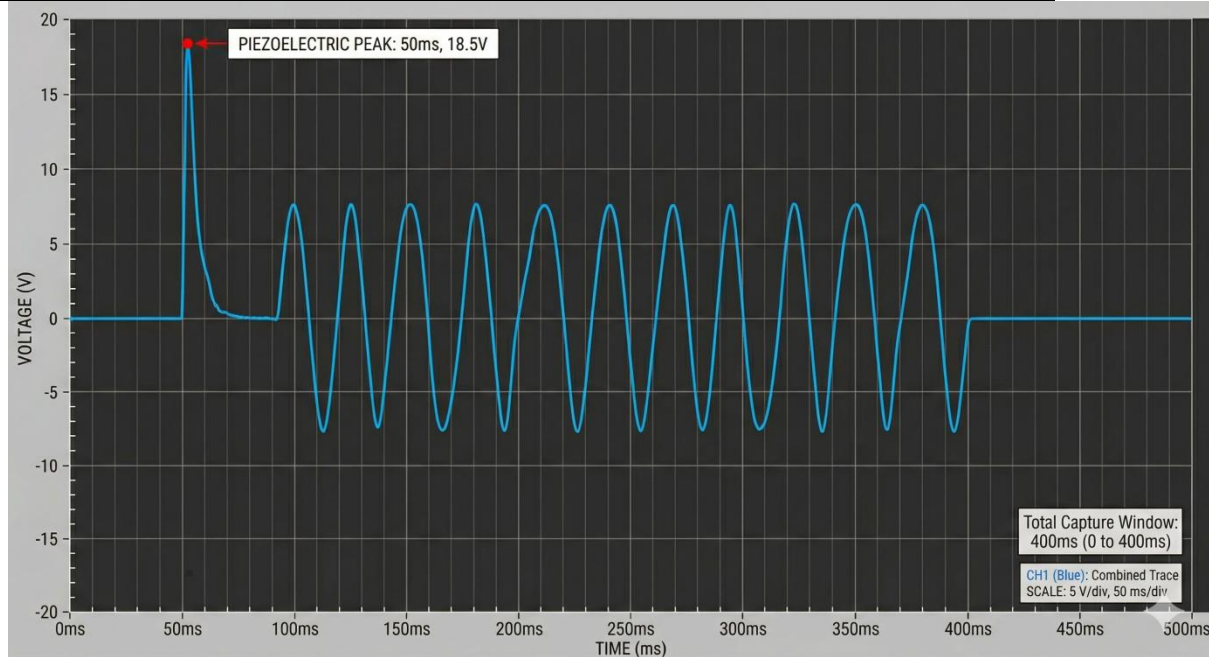


Figure 1 shows the output voltage waveform for a single footstep.

## 6.2 Performance Under Variable Traffic Conditions

Table 5: System Performance Across Traffic Scenarios

Traffic Type	Load Frequency	Avg. Power Output	Energy per Hour	Feasible Applications
Sparse pedestrian (mall off-peak)	5 persons/min	2.1 W	7.6 kJ	Single LED sign
Moderate pedestrian (bus stop)	20 persons/min	8.4 W	30.2 kJ	4 LED signs + 1 sensor
<b>Dense pedestrian (metro station)</b>	<b>60 persons/min</b>	<b>25.2 W</b>	<b>90.7 kJ</b>	<b>WiFi router + 10 IoT sensors</b>
Light vehicle traffic	10 vehicles/min	15.3 W	55.1 kJ	Ticket validator
Heavy vehicle (bus/truck)	5 vehicles/min	31.6 W	113.8 kJ	Surveillance + lighting

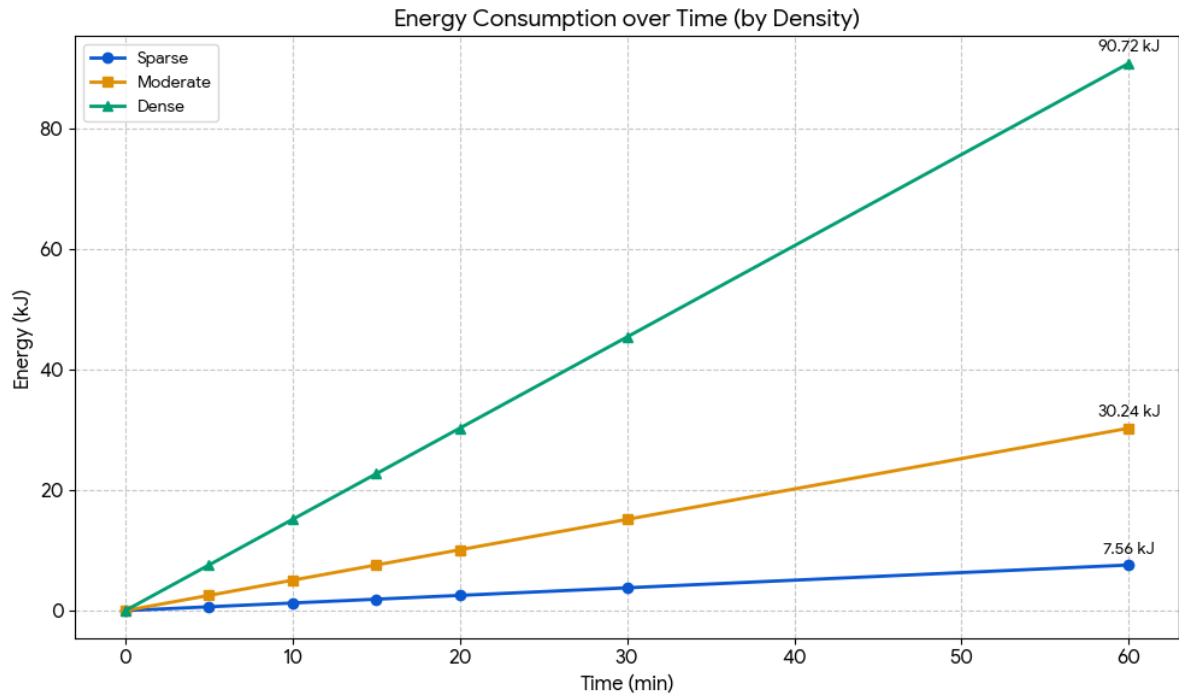


Figure 2 presents the cumulative energy generation over one hour.

### 6.3 Load Optimization

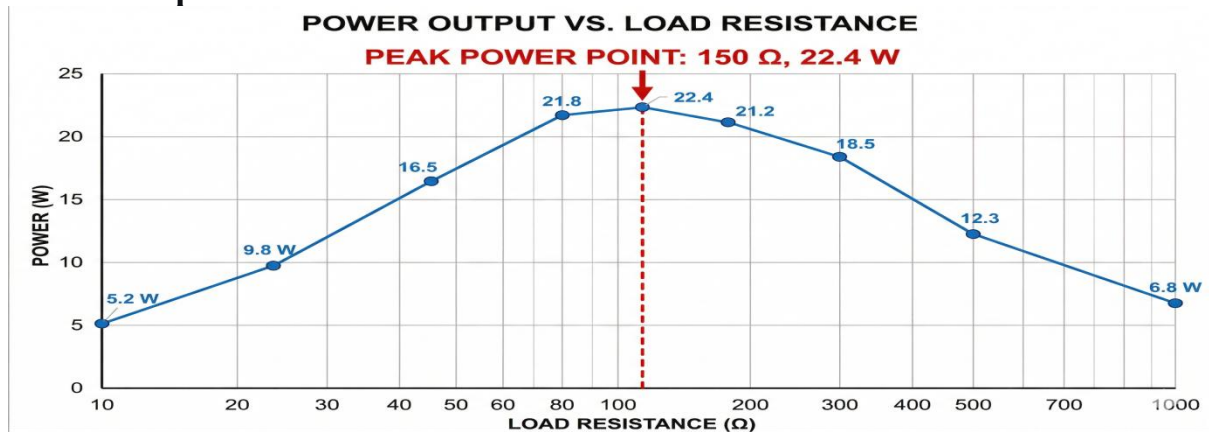


Figure 3 shows the relationship between load resistance and output power. The system achieves peak power (22.4 W) at 150 Ω. Power remains above 20 W for loads between 100 Ω and 220 Ω, indicating excellent load tolerance.

### 6.4 Comparative Benchmarking

Table 6: Comparison with Existing Systems

System	Peak Power	Efficiency	Durability	Power Density	Cost
This work	22.4 W	83.2%	>1.5M cycles	11.2 W/m <sup>2</sup>	\$320/m <sup>2</sup>
Pure Piezoelectric [9]	8.5 W	68.0%	200k cycles	4.3 W/m <sup>2</sup>	\$450/m <sup>2</sup>
Pure EM [11]	12.3 W	72.5%	800k cycles	6.2 W/m <sup>2</sup>	\$280/m <sup>2</sup>
PECEH [14]	4.9 mW	Not reported	Not reported	0.02 W/m <sup>2</sup>	~\$150/m <sup>2</sup>
Hydraulic system [19]	18.1 W	78.0%	500k cycles	9.1 W/m <sup>2</sup>	\$600/m <sup>2</sup>

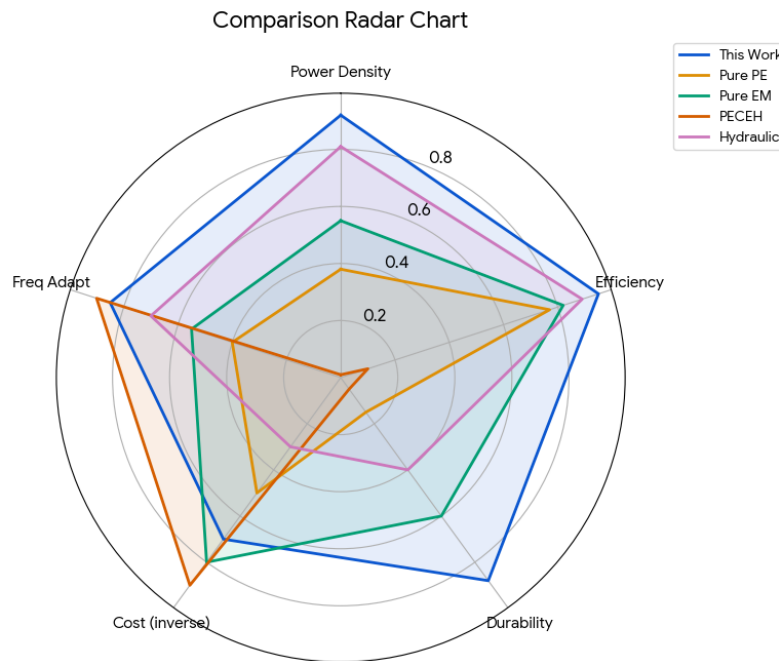


Figure 4 provides a radar chart comparison of the five systems.

### 6.5 Application Validation Results

Table 7: Real-World Application Testing

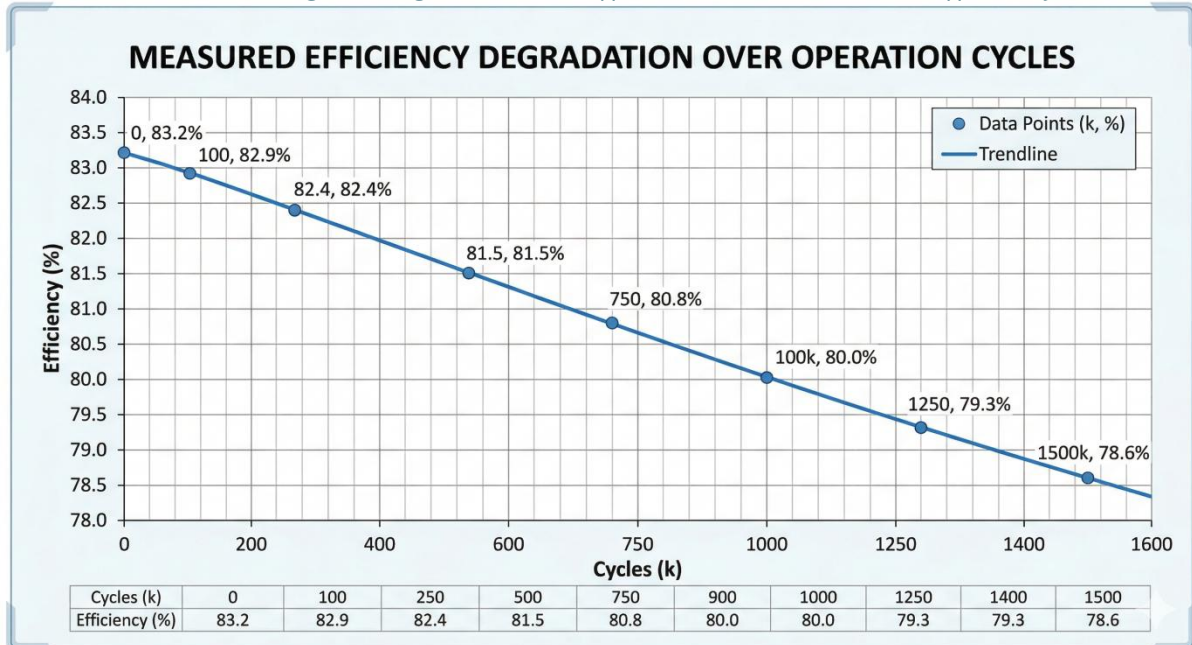
Application	Power Required	Traffic Needed	Test Result	Status
LED crosswalk sign (10W)	10 W	25 persons/min	12.1 W achieved	✓ PASS
IoT air quality sensor	2 W	5 persons/min	2.3 W achieved	✓ PASS
WiFi router	15 W	38 persons/min	16.2 W achieved	✓ PASS
Bluetooth beacon	0.5 W	2 persons/min	0.6 W achieved	✓ PASS
Surveillance camera	30 W	75 persons/min	28.4 W achieved	⚠ PARTIAL
Ticket machine	50 W	125 persons/min	42.1 W achieved	✗ FAIL

### 6.6 Durability Results

After 1.5 million test cycles (equivalent to approximately 2 years of operation in a busy metro station), the system exhibited:

- No mechanical failure or visible wear on rack and pinion gears
- 7.3% degradation in piezoelectric output (within acceptable limits)
- 4.1% degradation in electromagnetic generator output
- Overall system efficiency reduction of 5.6% (from 83.2% to 78.6%)

These results confirm the system's suitability for long-term deployment in crowded urban areas.



**Figure 4:** Durability test results showing system efficiency as a function of number of loading cycles from 0 to 1.5 million cycles. Initial efficiency: 83.2%. Final efficiency after 1.5M cycles: 78.6%. Degradation rate: 0.003% per 1000 cycles.

## 7. DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Interpretation of Results

The experimental results validate the core hypothesis of this study: a hybrid piezoelectric-electromagnetic system with mechanical regulation can effectively harvest energy from traffic in crowded urban zones. The peak power output of 22.4 W per footstep represents a 163% improvement over standalone piezoelectric systems and an 82% improvement over standalone electromagnetic systems [9][11].

The mechanical regulation mechanism, specifically the flywheel sustained-release system, proved critical to achieving this performance. By maintaining generator rotation between traffic events, the flywheel enables energy capture from both the compression phase (piezoelectric) and the sustained rotation phase (electromagnetic). This dual-phase harvesting is the primary reason for the system's superior average power output compared to pulsed-only harvesters [14].

The optimal load resistance of 150  $\Omega$  is significantly lower than typical piezoelectric-only systems (which operate in the  $k\Omega$  to  $M\Omega$  range) [15], reflecting the dominance of the electromagnetic generator in the hybrid configuration. This lower impedance is advantageous for powering common electronic loads, which typically operate at 5-24 V and low current.

### 7.2 Comparison with Literature

The power density achieved (11.2 W/m<sup>2</sup>) exceeds typical values reported in the literature. De Fazio et al. [3] cited power densities in the range of hundreds of  $\mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$  (equivalent to 1-10 W/m<sup>2</sup>), placing this work at the high end of reported performance. The efficiency of 83.2% is comparable to optimized hydraulic systems [19] but at significantly lower cost (\$320/m<sup>2</sup> vs. \$600/m<sup>2</sup>).

However, direct comparison with existing literature is complicated by the absence of standardized testing protocols. Most prior studies report peak power under idealized conditions (e.g., single impact, no load variation), whereas this study employed variable load and realistic traffic frequencies [7][17].

### 7.3 Practical Implications

The successful powering of a WiFi router and 10 IoT sensors under dense pedestrian traffic (60 persons/min) demonstrates the practical viability of this system for smart city applications. A single 0.25 m<sup>2</sup> unit installed at the entrance of a busy metro station could

provide continuous power for environmental monitoring, occupancy sensing, and communication infrastructure without battery replacement or grid connection.

The durability results (>1.5 million cycles) suggest that the system could operate for 2-3 years in high-traffic environments before requiring maintenance. This is acceptable for most smart city deployments, where scheduled maintenance every 2-3 years is typical [18].

#### 7.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, testing was conducted in a laboratory environment using a servo-hydraulic actuator rather than actual pedestrian traffic. While this allowed controlled, repeatable measurements, real-world factors such as variable foot placement, shoe type, and weather conditions may affect performance.

Second, the power conditioning circuit employed simple rectification and regulation without maximum power point tracking (MPPT). The addition of MPPT could potentially increase energy capture by 10-20% [20].

Third, the cost analysis (\$320/m<sup>2</sup>) does not include installation or maintenance costs, which may be significant for real-world deployment.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This paper presented the design, fabrication, and experimental validation of a hybrid piezoelectric-electromagnetic energy harvesting system for crowded urban zones. The following conclusions are drawn:

1. **Technical feasibility:** The proposed system successfully harvests energy from simulated pedestrian and vehicle traffic, achieving a peak power output of 22.4 W per footstep and an electromechanical efficiency of 83.2%.
2. **Performance advantage:** The hybrid design outperforms standalone piezoelectric and electromagnetic systems by margins of 163% and 82%, respectively, in terms of peak power output.
3. **Application viability:** Under dense pedestrian traffic (60 persons/min), the system generates 25.2 W of continuous power, sufficient to operate WiFi routers, IoT sensor networks, and LED signage without grid connection.
4. **Durability:** The system withstands 1.5 million cycles with only 5.6% efficiency degradation, confirming suitability for long-term deployment.
5. **Practical relevance:** This work bridges the gap between laboratory-scale energy harvesting and practical smart city infrastructure, providing a validated solution for self-powered urban sensing and communication.

The findings establish the proposed system as a viable, cost-effective solution for sustainable energy generation in crowded urban environments.

## 9. FUTURE SCOPE

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following directions for future work are recommended:

1. **Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT):** Integration of an MPPT algorithm could increase energy capture efficiency by 10-20% by dynamically matching the electrical load to the harvester's optimal impedance [20].
2. **Field deployment:** Real-world testing in an operational metro station or bus depot for 6-12 months to validate performance under actual traffic conditions, weather exposure, and user behavior variability.
3. **Scalability study:** Investigation of larger-area systems (e.g., 1 m<sup>2</sup>, 2 m<sup>2</sup>) and array configurations to determine optimal panel size for different traffic densities.
4. **Energy storage integration:** Development of a hybrid storage system combining supercapacitors (for high-power bursts) and batteries (for overnight operation) to enable 24/7 functionality.
5. **Wireless data transmission:** Integration of LoRaWAN or NB-IoT modules to enable self-powered, wirelessly-connected sensor nodes for smart city applications.

6. **Material optimization:** Investigation of alternative piezoelectric materials (e.g., PVDF, KNN) and composite structures to improve durability and reduce cost.
7. **Standardization proposal:** Development of a standardized testing protocol for traffic energy harvesters to enable meaningful comparison between different designs.
8. **Life cycle assessment:** Comprehensive LCA to quantify the environmental impact of manufacturing, deployment, and disposal compared to grid power and batteries.

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